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What's New in VA Caregiving?

Communicating With Your Care Partner

Submitted by the Caregiver Support Line

Even in the best of relationships, there can be communication problems. When someone has an illness or has been injured and now requires help, it can be even more difficult to communicate. Communicating during a crisis can be especially challenging. It is common for misunderstandings or arguments to occur. As a Caregiver you may sometimes feel discouraged because you do not feel that you are communicating effectively with your care partner.

Below are 5 tips that you might find useful:

- 1) Listening versus hearing – Your care partner may appear different now as a result of an illness or injury, however keep in mind that he or she is still an adult with feelings and needs. It is important to show your care partner that you are listening. Try to maintain a calm voice when talking to your care partner. Avoid trying to solve the problem while your partner is talking and focus on what is being said.
- 2) Stay in the present – While it may be beneficial to have an understanding of symptoms, limitations, or concerning behaviors related to an injury or illness, this information may not be helpful to bring up during a disagreement. Discuss what is occurring at that moment and try not to bring up old resentments and disagreements. Use positive language to show how your relationship will improve once the problem is resolved.
- 3) Have a plan of action – You may be experiencing anxiety in communicating with your care partner. Take some time to write down your thoughts and what you would like to say. Keep in mind, however, that using email or text messaging to talk about serious matters may not be as effective. While it may seem that it will cause less conflict, words can be misunderstood without hearing the tone and intent of someone's voice. Pick a time to talk when you both are available.
- 4) Use "I statements" – You may have learned about "I statements" previously. "I statements" are effective because they prevent your words from being viewed as accusations. Instead of saying "You make me mad" try rephrasing it with an "I statement" saying, "I feel (state feeling)."
- 5) Offer feedback – Sometimes when communicating it may seem like you are not reaching your care partner. After discussing an important topic ask your care partner to repeat back your concerns and how he or she feels about what you said.

These are just a few tips that may be helpful in communicating with your partner. You



may find it helpful to have the assistance of a therapist or counselor to help you with practicing these techniques and learning additional strategies. For assistance in exploring and locating a counselor or therapist, contact your local VA Medical Center Caregiver Support Coordinator or Primary Care Social Worker for assistance.

The VA Caregiver Support Line also has licensed social workers available to provide support, information and linkage to a variety of VA supportive services available to assist Caregivers of Veterans and can initiate referrals to VA Caregiver Support Coordinators in the Caregiver's local area. If you would like to speak with a Social Worker on the Caregiver Support Line, please call (toll free) 1-855-260-3274.



“What Is Respite?”

Respite Care is a short-term service to give the Veteran's Caregiver a period of relief from the demands of providing daily care. Veterans can receive respite care in an inpatient, outpatient or home setting. Respite Care is planned in advance for the benefit of the Caregiver and is coordinated through a social worker at the local VA medical center. Contact your VA Medical Center Caregiver Support Coordinator or Primary Care Social Worker for more information on Respite in your area. Caregiver Support Coordinators can be located by visiting the VA Caregiver website at www.caregiver.va.gov. You can also request to speak with a Social Worker or Caregiver Support Coordinator by calling your local VA Medical Center.



CareTips: Preventing Caregiver Stress

- Ask for help when you need it.
- Eat healthy foods, exercise and get enough rest.
- Prioritize, make lists and establish a daily routine.
- Stay in touch with family and friends.
- Join a support group for Caregivers in your situation.
- Remember, VA is here for you, too.